

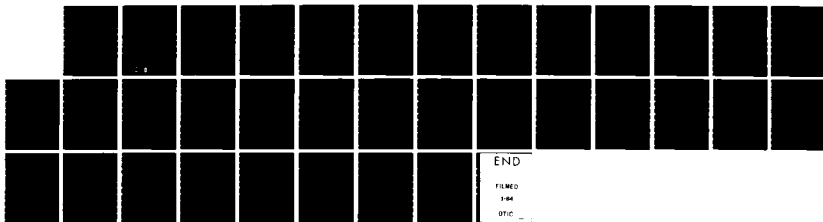
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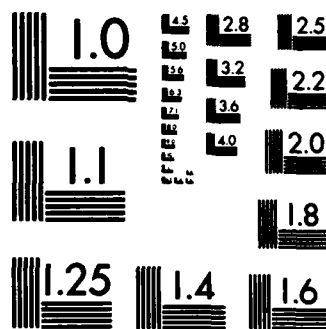
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KOREA: AN OVERVIEW
by
Lucian W. Pye

1987

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KOREA: AN OVERVIEW

by

Lucian W. Pye

The Korean "miracle" is an economic phenomenon, deserving of wonderment, and its future will be decisive for what will happen in nearly every aspect of Korean life. If the "miracle" can be transformed into sustained, respectable growth -- say, proceed at average rates of 4 1/2% to 6 1/2%, with continuing low inflation -- the remarkably homogenous Korean society will remain coherently integrated, and Korea's considerably more fragile political system will still be able to mute and absorb substantial strains. Thus, the economy is unquestionably Korea's strongest suit; its social relations and cultural identity, which are beginning to show the signs of the typical differentiations of modernization, is a second strong, but weaker, suit; while clearly its political system is vulnerable for its legitimacy is clouded and its structures of power are far from institutionalized.

If, however, the economy stalls or is seen as faltering, even for a brief period, the political repercussions could be dramatic. Ironically, if this were to happen the most vocal critics would probably charge that the source of the national difficulty was precisely Korea's economic achievements, which they generally dis-



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miss as only vulgar materialism -- even while employing a Marxist vocabulary that first extolled materialism as the propelling force of history.

The effects of the economy upon social change are also profound as they stimulate the emergence of an ever stronger and more vocal middle class, which is highly educated and increasingly receptive to new ideas. The consequence of this relationship is another paradox: continued sustained economic development is likely to undermine, albeit at a slower pace than would an economic crisis, the current political arrangements and especially the authority of President Chun Doo Hwan.

→ Korea's political vulnerability to economic setbacks defies conventional theorizing for Korea is blessed with an astonishingly durable social fabric, based on an exceptionally homogenous population, a broadly shared educational experience, a common set of values that has transformed the traditional Confucian appreciation of leisure into a modern, compulsive work ethic, and a family system which is still so mutually supportive as to spare government's need to worry about social services and old age assistance. And, therefore, all of these, and other factors, should seemingly be enough to cushion any economic shocks; and maybe they will. The reason for anxiety, however, is that the Korean political system is not in the same league with the Korean economy and its basic society.

To point to the relative frailties of the political situation is not, however, to sound an alarmist note. For some time critics of the Republic of Korea regime have vacillated between predicting either

explosive uprisings or massive and ruthless repression. Although there are grounds for uncertainty, and certainly some previously acceptable authoritarian practices have become increasingly unpopular, these worst case scenarios are not likely. More gradual erosion of authority and a drift toward alienation and cynicism are the more likely dangers.

The prospects for the economy are, as Paul Kuznets notes, reasonably good. The problems of 1980-82, which saw many firms go under, were mainly related to the world recession, but already a stronger Korean economy has begun to respond quickly to the recovery in the United States. The generally optimistic outlook is marred by two potential sources of trouble. The first is the danger of protectionism in foreign markets. Fortunately the incipient forces of economic nationalism have apparently lost momentum with the sign of general recovery. The second possible problem is that the free market advocates among the Korean technocrats will lose ground to the champions of a state capitalism system, which is the Korean version of economic nationalism. This problem, however, is largely a matter of political confrontations and thus a question to be dealt with in our analysis of political tendencies.

At the outset we need to acknowledge the strength of Vincent Brandt's description of the vitality of Korean social life and of the fact that "... by and large the sociological adaptation to rapid change has been successful. The great majority of the population is optimistic and welcomes further change in the expectation that it means continuing improvement University students, while denouncing

many aspects of the new urban-industrial civilization that is developing in South Korea, are among the first to follow its changing fashions." The society blends continuing respect for many traditions with a spirit of openness, an acceptance of considerable social and geographic mobility, and a considerable amount of "brash, disrespectful egalitarianism."

Legitimacy: Building Castles in the Sand.

Korea's basic political problem to put it in a single word, is one of legitimacy. Almost all of the specific criticisms of the government of President Chun Doo Hwan would fall into the category of every day human griping in a typical developing country; but they must be seen in magnified form because they are articulated in a context of widespread skepticism about the inherent legitimacy of the President's rule.

Just to enumerate the sources of this legitimacy problem is to make clear why it is going to be difficult for the government to resolve it. First, there was the fact that after the assassination of President Park Chung Hee there was a near universal expectation that the increasing repressive rule of the once popular president, furthered by his self-serving authoritarian constitution, would be replaced by a liberalizing trend, which for many Koreans became a vivid dream of an utopian democracy. For a brief period of a few months in late 1979 and early 1980 such dreams seemed possible, but soon realistic Koreans came to appreciate how quickly their economy was faltering when it

lacked clear government guidance. For the utopian believers the use of economic arguments to justify Chun's decisive move to power made them permanently suspicious of all economic justifications for governmental actions. An extreme but numerically not insignificant element of the Korean intelligentsia has even gone so far as to convince itself that economic progress per se is reactionary. Yet, the establishment of the Fifth Republic in June, 1981, did signal a new era in Korea's economic and political development. The uncertainty following the assassination of President Park was now to be replaced with a period of renewed economic growth and political order. Still the question of the legitimacy of the new presidency continued to haunt public acceptance of the new order.

A second source of discounting the Government's legitimacy is a blend of boredom and exasperation over the government's obligation to constantly remind everyone of the threat of invasion from the North. Most Koreans, when engaged in sober reflection, will admit to themselves that North Korea does indeed pose a security threat of a high order, but the need to hear the government constantly harping on the problem over so many decades makes the government seem to have a simple, one-track mind which can be taken as proof of rigid conservative, if not reactionary, thinking -- hence the appeal for the unrealistic goal of "reunification," of which more shortly. As Brandt notes, it is simply unnatural for a people who are cocky, self-assured and bold risk-takers to have to live with a permanent state of anxiety over foreign invasion.

A third and most serious source of the legitimacy problem is that every thinking Korean has been able to see through the sham of "opposition" parties, manufactured by clumsily disguised government moves. There is no shortage of Korean politicians itching to take on the role of a loyal, and even reasonably responsible, opposition to the government, but as things now stand they are saddled with the party leaders who are, to put it as graciously as possible, indebted to the government -- the ungracious critics say they are simply in the government's pay.

The idea that an authoritarian government might help itself (with world opinion, if not with domestic public opinion) ^{by establishing synthetic parties/} ~~was not~~ original with President Chun Doo Hwan but has a long if unimpressive history. Probably its most successful practitioner was Kemal Ataturk whose competitive spirit was such as to have been exhilarated by the idea of ordering some of his brightest ministers to form two separate parties and to take each other on, with no holds barred. (In designing his replica of a competitive democratic system, Ataturk even went so far as to order the creation of a secret, underground Communist party whose scheming activities in supposed support of Marxism-Leninism completely addled the Comintern agents assigned to organize Turks for Marxism-Leninism.) Chun Doo Hwan's strategy is less reminiscent of Ataturk's than of the more manipulative approach of President Suharto, who, secure with his strong government Golkar party, insisted that Indonesia's disarray of opposition parties should be tidied up and organized into two parties -- a secular one and an Islamic one -- a move which mystified many foreign observers who knew the government was profoundly concerned over precisely the dangers of Islamic revivalism and who wondered why Suharto should also want to unite all of his secular critics. The subsequent election campaign revealed

the craftiness of President Suharto. By forcing his opponents to unite they soon fell to squabbling, infighting, back biting, and generally behaving in ways that made it clear to everyone that they lacked the capacity to rule.

Similarly, in determining who should be the leaders of the opposition parties, Chun Doo Hwan combined political leaders who resent having to work together and who have since dissipated their energies in plotting new combinations, which the government simply disallows. More specifically, he selected pliable leaders but saddled them with bright, ambitious, and relatively uncorruptable subordinates, a move which insures that no one can trust the other. Thus, in contrast to the imperial British who believed that they had hit upon the ultimate formula for perpetuating their domination with the principle of "divide and rule," Chun Doo Hwan, along with Suharto, has hit upon the more entertaining stratagem of "combining to confound."

Paradoxically, however, the government's blatant involvement in the affairs of the "opposition" parties has compelled those leaders to be more aggressive in articulating anti-government sentiments, which inevitably only further undermines the government's legitimacy. Korea's controlled press, which we will come to in a moment, does check the effectiveness of this opposition rhetoric -- except during sessions of the National Assembly when the press is free to report whatever outlandish ideas any politician may express. Similarly, when Korean opposition leaders go abroad they are quick to exploit the occasion and make speeches which become uninhibited attacks upon the legitimacy of the Korean government.¹ Given the behavior on the part of the

¹ A not untypical example of how a reportedly "government-kept"

government-blessed "opposition," the rhetoric of some of the main Korean dissidents seems almost redundant. The effect, however, is to make the illegitimacy of the government a conventional idea.

Although many foreign critics of the Republic of Korea might argue that the prime source of the government's legitimacy problem is its human rights record and particularly its treatment of the dissidents, it is in fact surprisingly hard to determine the extent to which the activities of the dissidents have hurt the government. Unquestionably, the fact of dissidents being arrested, engaging in fasts, and going into exile, has hurt the ROK's international reputation and contributed to the tendency to lump South Korea with the "pariah" countries of Taiwan, South Africa, and Israel. Yet domestically the acknowledged suffering of the leading dissidents has not as yet made them into martyrs, largely because for one reason or another they are publicly known to have various personal failings. These "warts" would hardly be noticed in other societies, but, ironically, the Korean

oppositon leader, to show his "independence," feels compelled to attack his country while abroad (with the government, of course, understanding the charade) was the address by Yoo Chisong, President of the Democratic Korea Party, entitled "Legitimacy of Political Regimes and a Perspective on Democracy in Korea," given at the "East-West Center, Honolulu, June 22, 1981. No American politician has, I suspect, ever been as anti-American before a foreign audience as Mr. Yoo was anti Korean -- indeed, it is hard to imagine any politician making such strident attacks upon the legitimacy of the system of which he was a part. In his language and his unwillingness to make any concessions, Mr. Yoo's speech belongs to the category of rhetoric associated with, say, South African exiles. Yet, in the Korean context his performance was apparently dismissed as no more than an effort to pose as an "independent" politician.

crisis of legitimacy which has caused the Koreans to become excessively cynical, and prepared only to honor perfection, has made them even cynical about the most dedicated critics of government. As Thomas Robinson insightfully notes, Koreans tend to allow their political loyalties to gravitate to the extreme -- either they are mindlessly committed to authority or they are anxious to be more cynical than the others, taking hope only in the manifestly helpless cause.

Before we slip into the even more complex question of frustrations with current developments we need to pull back and try to explain the persistence of the legitimacy problem of the Republic of Korea. We could go on enumerating other examples of the government's legitimacy crisis, but further evidence would not help to explain why Korean society, so durable in other ways and so successful economically, seems to have such a problem with public authority.

Although die-hard critics of the ROK would probably not even agree to play such an intellectual game, let us suggest that among fair-minded people it is worthwhile posing the hypothetical question: Assuming that President Chun Doo Hwan were to meet the tests of reasonable men as to what would be the best practical policies, would it really be possible for him to resolve Korea's legitimacy problem? (The die-hard critics will, of course, immediately leap to the debator's point and deride the mere idea of "reasonable men's tests" and "practical policies," saying that both fudge the issue and act as cover-ups of the problem -- but so be it, is the only answer if we are to dig for more than cliché explanations.) Let us skirt the issue of President Chun's

motives and stick only to what seems possible, given Korean cultural attitudes and the realities of the international situation.

If we do this it seems immediately apparent that President Chun Doo Hwan, whatever his preferences, is confounded with two vexing problems which makes it unlikely that he will be able readily to solve his legitimacy crisis.

First, there is Korea's legacy of being more Confucian than the Confucian Chinese. This has made the Koreans, first, idealize authority to such a degree that they fancy their rulers should indeed be paragons, more moralists than strategists, and, second, they assume that they should personally be spared troubles if only their rulers did the right thing. In short, although products of the Confucian tradition may appear to be ready champions of forms of authoritarianism, they are also prone to believe that authority should be completely nurturing, and hence any suffering must be the fault of the authorities. Chun Doo Hwan is thus caught in a bind: To gain legitimacy he must inflate his image of authority, but the grander his authority appears the more he will be criticized for not alleviating people's problems.

Secondly, Chun Doo Hwan has a peculiarly lonely role as leader, for in the Korean political system of today there are not many pillars of society who can reinforce the legitimacy of the country's top man. In a sense, Korea has a "king" but no surrounding "nobles" to broaden the basis of authority and to reinforce legitimacy. The government itself is dependent upon the Blue House; both ministers and local leaders derive their authority from the president, on an almost personal

basis, and thus are not in a position to evoke commitments to the legitimacy of the system. The normal institutions of an establishment do not have sufficient autonomous power to perform as champions of the legitimacy of the national political system. As we shall see, the press is weak and vulnerable, hence not trusted as a supporter of legitimacy; business leaders and industrialists are much too dependent upon government and are not seen as having separate voices of national leadership; academic leaders have had too often to be agents of government policies to be an autonomous moral and intellectual force for the larger well-being of the nation. And, of course, the President's reliance upon the Army only negates his claim that Korea has a civilian government, not military rule.

Thus, the fact that the President is aware of his problem of legitimacy compels him to try to project an image of individual leadership, which in turn isolates him further, and the enterprise becomes one of building a castle on sand.² The fact that the Korean imagination

2 Cynics note that the first ten minutes of the 9 o'clock news is routinely devoted to Chun Doo Hwan's activities and therefore they say the news begin at 9:10. Distinguished guests to the Blue House have been astounded by the President's practice of seating himself to dinner at a separate table, a stage higher than the main table, surrounded by a wall of flowers which further distances him from even powerful United States Senators and ambassadors. As a further effort to prove his legitimate superiority over all others, his meal is served on a different, and golden, plate.

of what true authority should be calls for a bigger than life figure, a wiser-than-any-one man, and a benevolent philosopher-king, means that Chun Doo Hwan feels that he must try to rise above himself to achieve a fictitious guise. The need to inflate brings on a need to be reassured, to be surrounded by obedient, but also respected, advisors. It is this combination of needing to project grandeur but also feeling insecure which explains the bizarre need of Chun Doo Hwan to bring with him the cream of the talent of his government in his tragic October 1983 visit to Rangoon.

To the extent to which Chun Doo Hwan has gained self-confidence in his presidential role, he has tilted toward an imperious manner, acting more formal and ceremonial in public, less inclined to visit the countryside, and hence ever more isolated from his subjects. All of which does not blur in the minds of Koreans the fact that his road to power was by way of military coup and the Kwangju repression.

The concern with building authority goes beyond projecting the image of President Chun. In a society which is already remarkably homogeneous and which has withstood the travails of war and occupation the government still feels the need to expend inordinate effort to ensure conformity and enthusiasm for the national identity. The result has been the controversial Saemual Undong, discussed from different perspectives by Robinson and Brandt. Unquestionably a blending of military authoritarianism and Confucian moralism, the movement hits responsive cords among government cadres, who need to feel that they have a shield against criticism by merely displaying

dedication, and at the other extreme the peasantry, who concentrate on the economic pay-offs of its developmental drive. For the urban class, growing larger and more sophisticated every year, it seems all too sophomoric. To the Westerner the Saemual Undong seems to be a vulgar blending of Confucian emperor worship, Maoist fanaticism, and an embarrassing mirror image of the glorification of Kim Il-sung campaigns of North Korea. Although it is hard to judge the enduring impact of the movement on Korean political culture, it seems likely that in a true Confucian style the Koreans can comfortably separate the ideological rhetoric of the movement from the practical aspects of its positive impact on rural life. (Given the capacities of the Koreans, like the Chinese, to divorce ideological rhetoric from practical calculations, it is surprising that the government, which must be aware of this talented Korean way of managing cognitive dissonance, should continue to dissipate so much effort for the ideology when what clearly counts in the countryside are the practical pay-offs.) The lasting commitment of the government to the movement has to be understood as a manifestation of a real need to strengthen the legitimacy of a state which in its dependence upon outside support may seem to some as somehow less legitimately nationalistic than the North.³

3 The fact that the nationalistic thrust of the Saemual Undong contains a substantial degree of barely disguised anti-American sentiments needs to be understood against the background of persistent criticism that Seoul's regimes have had to be conspicuously dependent upon the United States.

The Public's Frustrations of Impotence.

The opposite side of the coin of the government's problems of legitimacy is the phenomenon of alienation among the Korean public. Again, we need to add the reminder that we are not envisaging a crisis situation, but we are identifying some troublesome realities, many of which are not untypical of developing countries.

There seem to be two major themes central to the alienation problem of South Korea. One is a matter of style and rhetoric, which can be quickly explained; while the other is a question of frustrations which are complex and have different forms with different elements in the society. As for style and rhetoric it seems that Korean culture, for all of its valuing of conformity, is surprisingly permissive in allowing people to vent their feelings, especially of anger and displeasure. The Korean concept of manliness does not apparently include the prescription that one should keep to one's self one's disappointments. Consequently foreigners are likely to hear grumblings from South Korean interlocutors, and the more modernized the Korean fancies himself to be the more freely he is likely to express his frustration, believing apparently that this makes him more cosmopolitan. Hence it is usually necessary to take with a grain of salt much of the complaining. But this must be done with care for at times the grievances are truly legitimate.

The key to appreciating the general problem of frustrations is the fact that all the desires for political change are constantly being shattered by the brutal fact that there is no dramatic alternative to

the current set-up. Change in Korea can at best be only very incremental. The constraints established by having an implacable foe to the north, of being a divided nation in an ideologically warring world, of having to give a primary place to the security forces and the domestic intelligence agencies, all conspire to make it unrealistic for Koreans to dream of more idyllic rules of government.

The problem of frustration is heightened by the persistent practice of popularizing solutions to today's frustration by formulating grandiose and unobtainable objectives. For example, one of the main reactions to dissatisfaction with the current situation has been to enthusiastically champion the goal of reunification. Koreans of all levels of political sophistication seem to believe that all their problems would evaporate if they could only have the magic solution of reunification -- a goal which consequently the government itself must loudly proclaim. But since it is completely unobtainable the effect is only to dramatize impotence, hence reinforce frustration.

The Korean notion that they are on to a clever policy solution by calling for "cross-recognition" belongs in the same category of escapism through impossible solutions. Many Korean intellectuals prefer to close their eyes to the fact that Beijing has limits to assisting publicly in the formalizing of divided nations. Their capacity for empathy for Beijing's problems is so limited that they cannot understand that if cross recognition is blessed for the peninsula then it might be seen as logical for the Taiwan Straits. So they prefer to complain that the Seoul government is not doing enough to achieve the

goal of "cross recognition." When one Korean intellectual was asked for an explanation for why thinking Koreans were so given to proclaiming the desirability of the impossible, he responded by saying, "It is like the man who when asked why he was banging his head against a wall said, 'It feels so good when I stop.' It is the same with us: After we have knocked ourselves out with these unsolvable international problems, our domestic problems don't seem so bad."

According to conventional wisdom students rank near the top of the alienated elements, and they are assumed to be possibly the most politically combustible element in the society, if for no other reason than that they played a major role in the downfall of Syngman Rhee's presidency and they created out of the Kiangju affair a black mark on the beginnings of Chun Doo Hwan's political career. Faculty members give somewhat contrasting reports on the mood of the students: some saying that only 5-10% of the students harbor radical political tendencies, while others describe more widespread dissatisfaction. Part of the problem is that Korean universities have in the past been somewhat like Japanese universities where students can relax after the competition for admission and do little until the last months. In short, seniors tend to drift toward realism but there are no pressures to urge the rest of the students to move beyond a sophomoric stage of development. In this state of suspension some 60% to 70% of the students can easily drift into becoming, as Brandt calls them, "sympathetic onlookers" of the radicalized minority. The government has sought to change this system, making universities a more serious place for study, by decreeing that a quota of one third of all

students must be failed and thereby standards raised. This proposal, however, proved unworkable because it would put more pressure on teachers than they are prepared to bear: The government also wants to strengthen the old Confucian notion of close, and disciplined, student-teacher relationship -- with the teachers taking responsibility for the "moral", i.e. political, character of their students. Again the "modernized" faculty is not prepared to shoulder such responsibilities. The government's proposed policy reflected its ignorance of student behavior for its proposal would have certainly been counter-productive as it would have alerted all students to the possibility that they were wasting their time trying to graduate and therefore even more might conclude that it only made sense to join the radicals.

Some of the opposition politicians believe that the government is building a time-bomb through its policies of trying to weed out "undesirable" students and expell any who become too politically active. They argue that these policies are creating a pool of aggressively alienated young people who can devote full time to radical activities, which include for the first time making effective contacts with grass roots elements, including in particular workers dissatisfied with their wages. Faculty observers tend to belittle this danger, noting that some of the expelled students simply go home or even in a few cases go abroad for their education. They also note that for the men the outcome is usually the three years of military service which was deferred when they entered the university.

The radicalized Korean students do not appear to be particularly sophisticated. For example, in the last few years they have been some-

what enamored with "dependency" theory, without, however, really understanding it, or appreciating its main thrust. Dependency theory as developed in Latin America is completely inappropriate to the Korean situation in that the theory purports to explain why it is impossible for an underdeveloped country to achieve economic growth because of the repressive character of the "world economic system." Korea, of course, has had spectacular economic growth, and has benefited immeasurably from the "world capitalist system." What the Korean students really have in mind is their political sense of subordination, particularly to the United States. But even when they acknowledge such a modification of what they have in mind when they speak of "dependency" theory, they have problems because they are left to cope with the contradiction of wanting on the one hand an escape from all foreign (U.S. and Japanese) influences, and yet on the other hand they demand that the United States pressure Chun's government into liberalizing more and creating a real democracy.

The frustrations of more than just students has caused a rise in anti-American sentiments in South Korea. Since both radical, neo-Marxist students and reactionary nationalistic propaganda cadres deal in anti-American themes it is clear that there is not a single basis for the sentiment, except that deep down there is probably a core of frustrations. In many respects present-day South Korean anti-Americanism is reminiscent of the comparable sentiment in Japan in the early 1960s. In both cases there had been a high degree of idealizing America as a champion of democracy and then disillusionment because the United States was not seen as making their respective Asian countries "true" democracies.

In part thus, anti-Americanism is being used as a way of hopefully influencing the United States government to do what the critics want. This style of assuming that it is useful to try to shame Americans is not limited to anti-ROK critics, for even government officials will not infrequently suggest that America is not doing right by Korea. (It never seems to occur to practitioners of this particular ploy that they might in fact be right, and Americans might just find that other countries are more congenial and hence will favor others over South Korea.)

Note should be taken of the fact that the Korean government officially sanctions some anti-American sentiments in the ideology sponsored by the Saemaul Undong. In part this is no more than the logical consequences of trying to advocate a stronger sense of national identity which recognizes a depreciation of foreign influences. But there is more bite to the sentiments than this would call for, and therefore anti-American dimensions must also be seen as a part of the government's striving for legitimacy. The officials seem to be hoping that by feelings they can convince the public that the government shares the "authentic" sentiments of the most "pure and virtuous" Koreans.

Since open anti-Americanism is a new phenomenon in South Korea it is hard to judge how much there is to it that goes beyond the natural reactions of reaching greater political maturity and no longer feeling it necessary to react as though they had just discovered that the United States was not perfect. It does seem that the wanton act of burning the USIS library at Pusan has had some sobering effect on the Korean public, making anti-Americanism less respectable.

Somewhat ironically it may turn out that the most enduring source of anti-Americanism will be elements among the Christians who are the closest to American missionaries. It does seem that some missionaries among the Maryknolls, who picked up a blend of social action and neo-Marxism from work in Latin America, have been introducing into South Korea ideas about class conflict and U.S. economic imperialism.

In general, however, the continued growth of the Christian community in South Korea is a stabilizing factor. This is because much of the expansion of church membership is among people who are experiencing the shocks of rapid social change, particularly of migration from the countryside to the impersonal cities. Churches thus seem to offer security for such people, making them less easy prey to those who would manipulate them politically or in other ways.

Among those who foresee a rocky future for the Republic of Korea, the major explosive force, second only to the students, is labor. Since 1961 economic growth has been the basis of the regime's claim to legitimacy and this has meant that through the 1970s everything was done to maintain labor peace; indeed, as the economy made its dramatic gains managers were prepared to compete for labor and consequently wages rose rapidly. Then, however, came the recession of the early 1980s and government became increasingly concerned that Korea was about to lose its competitive advantages, especially as the costs of labor might drastically hurt the country's balance of payments. Thus, although the constitution for the Fifth Republic guaranteed labor's rights to organize, the government passed laws which restricted the labor movement.

By 1983 the unions had lost their capacity to effectively challenge the combined forces of management and government, and union membership was down by nearly 20%. The government advanced the doctrine that as a Confucian society Korea did not need the wasteful confrontations of Western labor-management relations, but rather there should be harmony, cooperation and a common dedication to the national welfare. In 1980 the government established Labor Management Councils which were expected to achieve this ideal of harmony by bringing together labor representatives and management officials in a highly paternalistic context.

Although labor peace is likely with the revival of Korea's rapid economic growth and the prospect for higher wages, it should be recognized that among both workers and the general public there is a widespread belief that government has gone far too far in support of management, a tilting which has been seen as both unfair to labor and compromising of management, making the latter seem merely an agent of a questionably legitimate governmental authority.

While there are these seeds of labor discontent it does not seem likely that labor will be the destructive force predicted by some. Even less is there a chance that the students and workers will unite in their frustrations. As unhappy as the workers are they have no sympathy, indeed only contempt, for the ideological posturings and leadership claims of the students. It is the government which puts them together as common sources of trouble, hence exaggerating their potentials.

In most countries, including those of the developing world, journalists generally develop cynical views of politicians, and South

Korea is no exception. But since the South Korean press cannot get its revenge by exposing the powerful it has a sense of impotence which is particularly galling because as business enterprises Korean newspapers are rich and therefore give the false appearances of being powerful. The fact that the government does not trouble itself to be subtle in controlling the press is a further cause for the dispiritedness of the journalists. They know that the public knows that they are unable to be true to their profession. Consequently even when they do report accurately the public remains doubtful.

The constraints on the press run the gamut usual in developing countries from direct censorship to hint dropping, but they also include government ownership of controlling shares in supposedly privately owned newspapers and radio networks. There are, however, surprising limits to the effectiveness of censorship for, as Robinson observes, Koreans can listen in on the American Armed Forces broadcasts, read foreign publications, and above all they are still a part of a relatively small national community in which word of mouth communication is highly developed and extensively used.

The government and the press have, furthermore, struck a bargain which allows the press to practice various forms of cryptic and allegorical reporting which everyone can readily interpret -- including the government censors. There are, of course, tacit, but precise limits to what can and cannot be so reported. (The fact that one of the most widely understood of these rules is that nothing derogatory can be printed about the First Family, only means that on that subject

rumors tend to fly, and it is not impossible that people suspect worse of the First Family than the facts would justify.)

This brings us to the demoralizing effects of corruption. Not surprising in a country undergoing such dramatic and rapid economic growth, and where the government is dedicated to helping that growth, there has been a great deal of wheeling and dealing that is seen as corruption -- particularly since fortunes have been made so quickly. The close interactions of business and government not only bring officials into many forms of industrial and commercial decision-making but must make them envious of the entrepreneurs who make wealth while they remain as government officials on salaries.

The popular belief that corruption was rampant was exploited by Chun Doo Hwan when he first came to power. By ruthlessly dismissing thousands of officials on the grounds of corruption he created the impression that he would preside over a truly clean government. Since then there have been just enough questionable developments touching the First Family to make the first bold acts seem to be closer to patronage decisions than moral sanctions.

The problem of corruption in Korea is less its incidence or its magnitude and more the fact that the Confucian legacy has created a culture in which moral rectitude and personal dignity are the two absolute underpinnings for effective authority. Without them government must increasingly rely upon force which will only further compromise its legitimacy at home and abroad. Aware of this problem, the leadership strives to propagandize dignity and to deny the existence

of even the most trivial breaches of conduct of all those related to the President, thus setting for itself an impossible goal, the non-realization of which only serves to produce the opposite of intended consequences.

Balanced against these problem areas are some very sturdy features of the Korean society and polity. First among these is the Korean military. It would be false, however, to give the impression that the Korean armed forces as a bulwark are the kind of repressive institution associated with military rule in Third World countries. The Korean army has an elite officer corps, trained in the West Point tradition, dedicated to their country, and skilled in their profession. As in Western countries, and particularly in the United States, it is natural to call upon such officers to carry out demanding civilian tasks of government. In recent years it has been common, particularly among foreign critics of the ROK, to suggest that the utility of such officers in governing has passed, in that the Korean economy and polity have become far too complicated for people to manage who only have a command instinct. Whereas soldiers may have had their place in inspiring discipline and hard work during the early years of the Korean "miracle," now the country needs managers with much more sophisticated knowledge.

Among the Korean population, however, the military is seen in a different light. Universal military training for the men has produced general respect for the army and has made it a very human and admired institution. The military are seen as being composed of relatives and friends, and therefore it is not an abstract and impersonal institution.

Thus, as Brandt points out, the unfavorable views of the military encouraged by students, intellectuals, and the foreign press may have some "resonance in Korean popular opinion, but in any kind of crisis there is likely to be little confidence in either the heroic idealism of students or the feeble, tainted liberalism of the political opposition. The military leadership provides the reserve of strength and unity for troubled times that most Koreans would not want to do without."

The South Korean's feelings toward their military is more reminiscent of 1950s American sentiments about their country's uniform than of the Vietnam debate days. In this respect Korean society is still on the upbeat side in the quest for national greatness.

Considerably less influential, indeed surprisingly so given Korea's economic accomplishments, is the business and industrial leadership. Although the huge Korean industrial combines rank among the top of Fortune's international Five Hundred, their chief executives and owners are not recognized as national spokesmen or critical decision-makers for the country's affairs. Their liability is that they and everyone else know that they are uncommonly dependent upon the government, and it is they who must routinely bend to the whims of the less than legitimate authority. Rich as they may seem, they are also seen as dependent figures.

Indeed, the very successes of the major Korean enterprises are increasingly seen as bordering on scandal and not worthy achievements. The increasingly conspicuous gap between rich and poor is treated as a form of corruption, of sycophantic dependence upon government, and

not as evidence that the more deserving are being rewarded. The tolerance natural in any society for inequality which is based on the natural instinct to defer to one's betters has been increasingly eroded by the belief that the business community is a lackey of officialdom.

Yet, all of these liabilities aside, the business leadership is a fact in support of continuity. Although it lacks the conspicuous commanding presence of the business element in Western establishments, the Korean industrialists do command, at the margin, deference -- for, after the catharsis of frustration has been released, Koreans are realistic enough to know who among them to trust on the vital issues of jobs and the economy.

The ultimate strength of the Korean system lies less in particular institutions or social groupings and more in the tenacious sense of solidarity and national pride of an exceptionally homogeneous people. Koreans are contentious people, prone to divisive attacks and vigorous, self-righteous assertion of their individual claims; but even more, they are deferential and believers in the nobility of self-sacrifice. Hence, conflicts, which at one moment would seem to be taking the community to the brink of explosive civil strife, can suddenly be contained in favor of the higher imperative of disciplined harmony. Students who at one moment are actively engaged in disseminating poisonous rumors about their professors being government agents, will, on being reminded of their obligations, become suddenly deferential -- but it is just as likely that the reverential student will suddenly

assert unorthodox views. Similarly, workers can be on the verge of a work stoppage and then reverse themselves and even make sacrifices for the interests of the enterprises -- their only explanation is that it is all like being a member of a family, the intensity of the criticism being legitimized by the loyalty to the collectivity.

These contradictory characteristics of the Koreans do make it hard to judge probable developments. Especially since the dominant pattern is one of pulling back into a disciplined mode just before the reckless instinct assumes command -- but at times the controls are too weak and the damaging act occurs. The underlying strength of Korean character, especially when being simultaneously tested by temptations to be rebellious, was well demonstrated in 1983 by the national reaction to the shooting down of Korean Air Lines flight 007 and the bombing in Rangoon. Both events accentuated Korea's vulnerabilities and the realities of its foreign foes, yet the overwhelming responses were a strengthened national cohesion.

Forecasts and Prescriptions.

This brings us to the point where we can and should directly confront the issues of what do these considerations bode for South Korea's future, and what can be done to improve the situation.

As has been clear from our analysis government is decisive in Korea, and within government an inordinate proportion of decisions can only be made by the President. This raises the formidable problem of who can bell the cat. It is not clear that President Chun Doo Hwan

is predisposed to listen carefully to advisors, for it is well established that he prefers to talk rather than listen.

There are unquestionably little things which he could do to improve the legitimacy problem. And, indeed, in all fairness, he has done a host of things-- including the releasing of substantial numbers of banned or imprisoned political foes. But, unfortunately, the general climate of a legitimacy crisis allows his die-hard critics to say that for every one released another takes his place -- an obviously unfair judgment, but still a popular one.

Given the limits of what can be done in the short run, and given the danger of the United States expending diplomatic capital for less than even symbolic achievements, it is probably wisest to focus on the one act President Chun could do to restore dramatically confidence in the legitimacy of the government. This would be for him to indeed keep his word and follow the constitution by accepting its regulation that the president shall only have one term in office. To a critical degree the entire legitimacy problem in South Korea was started by his predecessors, Presidents Rhee and Park, both clinging to extra terms in office after their initial mandates had expired. Today there is widespread cynicism in Korea because people are not convinced that he will keep his word and retire when his term expires in 1987. It is even widely believed that he will not be able to put adherence to the constitution ahead of the childish desire to be in the office of the president at the time Korea hosts the 1988 Olympic Games.

At present there is no obvious person who could explain to President Chun that, first, no head of state has ever been remembered in association with the Olympic Games (except for Adolf Hitler's inexcusable treatment of Jessie Owens), and second, he would be truly immortal if he were to preside over the first orderly and constitutionally directed transfer of power in Korean history. The fact that South Korea has never had a non-violent and dignified succession is at the root of its legitimacy problem. If President Chun Doo Hwan were to execute a constitutionally correct transition of power he could change the entire spirit of South Korean politics and become a lasting hero of not only his country but a model for much of the rest of Asia, where, except for Japan, no other country has mastered the succession problem.

Fortunately, Chun Doo Hwan and his followers are on recent record in pledging that he will adhere to the constitution. Therefore, what is needed is for others, including specifically other governments, to repeatedly praise him and the Koreans for their maturity in this matter. This is an issue on which the U.S. Government should be prepared to expend diplomatic capital.

The fact that President Chun has been presiding over a liberalizing trend is also a matter that calls for praise, but in this case quiet diplomacy is probably better. The Korean government should know that the United States truly welcomes all moves towards greater democracy, but in public we should not be seen as either the tutor or in any way anxious to claim credit. The mere process of liberalizing, if it continues, will bring honor to the United States, and to try to appear

to be the motivating force behind the trend could be counter-productive.

The increased isolation of President Chun should be matter of concern only insofar as it may mean that he is losing the vital benefits of honest advice and information. The fact that the President is less given to informal mixings and inspection tours probably is only troublesome to Americans who believe that authority figures should be also men of the people. In all Asia, and particularly Confucian cultures, the preferred image of authority is that of the distant aloof figure -- note how Mao truly isolated himself, how Deng is now following suit, and Ho Chi Minh never mixed with ordinary Vietnamese except in poster pictures.

Looking beyond the role of the Blue House, the key question for the future is whether the Korean economy can continue its growth while maintaining reasonably equitable distribution of incomes. The recent recession has weeded out many of the less efficient enterprises, and in this sense strengthened those that survived, but the effect has also been to make the largest "groups" appear to dominate the economy more than ever. Hyundai, for example, had sales last year of \$7.6 billion, and it represents nearly 9% of South Korea's total G.N.P. Furthermore, the distinctively Korean approach to industrial development, which has been to combine the Japanese Zaibatsu system with aggressive foreign borrowing, has given the critics of big industries the double targets of both monopolistic practices and foreign capital dependence.

Yet in spite of this transition to ever bigger enterprises -- with close government involvement and support -- the fact remains that

prosperity is remarkably widely distributed in Korea and serious poverty is not present. (In some respects it is less conspicuous than in American cities where the innovative use of drugs has made it possible to empty large numbers of mental patients onto the street only to become "bag ladies" and "bag men".) The continued strength of the Korean family system means that as long as a reasonable proportion of the members are wage earners then all can expect to have a respectable existence. This said, the political fact remains that people do feel that income disparities are getting worse. In part this is because so much of Korean wealth is newly acquired, and therefore suspect, and because the government feels obliged to intervene to keep wages down so as to maintain Korea's competitive position in the export market.

Partly because of the negative political reaction to this perceived imperative of government the leadership has increasingly felt a need to improve its image by becoming more outspoken about what it sees as unfair protectionism against Korean exports. The government, for example, likes to make the point that U.S. quotas, because they favor the established suppliers, actually work to discriminate against the new Korean industries and help the older Japanese ones -- a complaint which seems to suggest to some Koreans that the government is not adverse to a degree of anti-Americanism.

In evaluating criticism of the Chun regime, and the charges of undue American support, of his "repressive" rule it is necessary to keep in mind two basic considerations, one of a general nature and one

that is specific to Korean culture. The general point is that the Korean opposition, like that in many other authoritarian-military ruled countries tends to hold to the fantasy that it is the magic of American power which holds up the regime and that if American "support" was only transferred to them the regime would collapse and they would have their dreams of power fulfilled. The need to exaggerate the potency of U.S. policy creates the obligation to shame Americans and to hope that by expressing anti-American sentiments they can somehow win over the support of Washington. In this no-win situation for U.S. policy it is still helpful to appear to be open to contacts with all legitimate elements even while recognizing that it will remain in their political self-interest to appear as anti-American.

The more distinctively Korean consideration is the fact that the Korean political culture remains profoundly authoritarian and hierarchical. Therefore it is pure wishful thinking to believe that the alternative to the present situation might be a liberal democratic political system revolving around open competition among responsible political parties. The complaints about the Chun government are not necessarily premised on democratic doctrine; indeed, many stem from a sense that the government is not adequately benevolent in its basic authoritarianism. There are, of course, some Korean voices which are expressing genuine democratic sentiments, but many more are consciously or unconsciously adhering to Confucian standards of moralistic authoritarianism.

Thus the alternatives to the current regime are likely to be at best some variation on the authoritarian model. A coup by younger

officers seeking a more morally acceptable leadership is not entirely unthinkable. Yet what is most likely is the continuation of a situation in which there is much frustration and complaining on the one side and repression and intimidation on the other. This is a formula, which if combined with constantly improving living standards, can be surprisingly durable.

With these introductory observations in mind, we can turn to the more detailed analyses of the Korean economy, polity, and society by Paul Kuznets, Thomas W. Robinson, and Vincent S.R. Brandt, respectively.

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